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Blacks go to EEOC; women may follow

Bias complaints proliferate at Post

By JUDY LUCE MANN

The complaint charging racial discrimination at the Washington Post filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission by seven Post reporters yesterday may soon be followed by a complaint by a group of women reporters at the newspaper charging sex discrimination.

Claudia Levy, a reporter at the Post and a member of the women's caucus there, said, "We feel there's a pattern of discrimination at the Washington Post." She said members of the women's caucus met this week with a lawyer to explore grievance methods.

Caucus members, she said, met two years ago with Post Executive Editor Benjamin Bradlee and then-Managing Editor Eugene Patterson. She characterized the meeting as "very friendly," and noted that "two women were hired shortly after that."

She added, "As far as we're concerned, there's been no major progress in the two years, tho there's been increasing sensitivity on treatment of women's news."

As of November, she said, 43 out of 307 reporters, editors and photographers at the Post were women, only two of whom — a deputy national editor and a deputy editorial page editor — have positions of authority.

The seven black Post reporters who filed the complaint with the EEOC yesterday said Post records showed there are only 13 black reporters. "The complaint represents our belief that this discrimination cannot continue to exist at a publication in a city that is 71.1 per cent black."

The complaint was filed following nearly six weeks of negotiating between the black reporters and Post management, represented generally by Mr. Bradlee and Managing Editor Howard Simons. The reporters proposed that within a year blacks should comprise 35 to 40 per cent of those employed in every editorial category and that an Equal Opportunity Employment officer be appointed.

On March 10, Mr. Bradlee agreed to hire another black reporter to cover national affairs — there is currently only one black on the national desk and he is on leave of absence — and to name a black metropolitan assignment editor. He also agreed to hire two trainees, to send two trainees to a crash program at Columbia School of Journalism, and designated his personnel lieutenant, Robert E. Lee Baker, EEO officer.

The black reporters called his proposal "an insult to our commitment, vague and totally unacceptable," and negotiations ended.

Mr. Bradlee refused comment on the EEOC complaint yesterday, referring inquiries to Post lawyer Joe Califano, who issued the following statement: "The Washington Post employs 21 black reporters, photographers and editors — more than any newspaper in the country."

"The Post has an affirmative action program. The news department implemented a supplemental action program on March 15. As part of that supplemental program, the Post has already hired one additional black reporter for the national staff, named one additional black assistant city editor and appointed two additional black reporter interns." Mr. Califano was not available for questions, according to a secretary.

Ivan Brandon, one of seven complainants to the EEOC, was appointed assistant city editor yesterday, he said, after being offered the job Wednesday.

Ron Taylor, one of the reporters, said at yesterday's press conference the addition of more blacks to the newsroom, would mean "more blacks would be involved in making the key decisions governing assignment of stories, display of stories and (incorporation of) a lot of information that much of the time is left out of the story which would make it more believable and more readable to black people."

As an example, he cited the Post's sports department, which is all white and all male. "All of a sudden the sportswriters have discovered playground basketball, which I've been playing since I was 8. All this stuff is too little and too late. It smacks of appeasement for black people. Generally, I don't see myself in the white general circulation media. I'm a significant part, but I'm not there."